

Matt Phillips
Ivan, the Beautiful Maiden, and Koshchei the Deathless
Russian Fairy Tales, Russian 0090
4-16-03

In a Certain kingdom there lived a husband and wife with three sons. Every night before putting the three boys to sleep the mother would tell them all the tale of how she was saved from the captivity of 3 Dragons by their valiant father who then married her.

One day, a war was started up in the East. There was talk in the village that soon men would be getting letters informing them of their new positions as soldiers in the army of the Tsar. Many men were afraid of going to war but others were eager to protect from invasion the land which gave them life and to serve the ruler who kept the country running in order.

The father would always come home after dealing with the fearful cowards and say, "Ah, I had to buy wood from such and such today. He fears every knock at the door could be a letter from the Tsar sending him off to the army. My sons won't be such cowards when they are men, will they?" And the three sons would say, "No father."

One day there was a knock at the door. It was a letter to the father with his orders to go off to join his regiment in the Tsar's army. "Good-bye my dear family," he said as he walked out the door with his rifle and saber in hand. The three boys ran up to him saying that they were brave and wanted to go fight in the war too. "No, no, you're too young. But how proud you are making me today as I am going off to defend our country," with this the father galloped off on his horse.

"Oh no," said the mother. It became apparent that the father had left the polish and sharpening stone he used to keep his saber in good shape. "You must hurry after your father and bring these to him. It will bring shame if your father shows up with a rusty and dull sword." So the boys packed up their father's tools and left the house with a kiss from their mother.

As they went along the eldest boy said to his brothers, "On our journey we shall have to make many decisions. I say it is best that for all difficult decisions we vote for our course of action." This seemed like a good idea and both of the other brothers agreed. "For our first decision I think we should vote on if Ivan should carry all our belongings since he is the youngest," said the oldest child. "Good idea," said the middle child. Only Ivan objected, but it was two against one so what could he do?

As they walked on they grew older. Not so much by the day as by the second. Their walk took them through a forest and in a clearing of this forest t saw a deer run swiftly down a path. (AA 472) They all gave chase, for by now they were all very swift of foot. Just when they were about to catch the deer, it ran into a little house. They found the house to be quite accommodating and decided to spend the night there. After investigating they found in the basement all sorts of salted meats, and cheeses. They were all woken up the next morning by a man an inch tall with a mustache as long as two miles.

"So, you think you can just come into my house and eat all my food for free eh?" said the little man, "This will show you!" He gave them all a thrashing, then picked them up by the backs of their necks and threw them out the door into the forest.

They three brothers decided to venture on. They came to another clearing and saw a deer run swiftly down a path. (AA 472) They all gave chase but just when they were about to catch the deer, it ran into a house twice the size of the first one they found. They found the house to be quite accommodating and decided to spend the night there. After investigating they found in the basement all sorts of barrels of beer and wine. They all drank their fill and fell asleep.

They were all woken up the next morning by a man an inch tall with a

mustache as two miles long. "So," he said, "do you always go into peoples' houses uninvited and drink up all they have?" He beat them all about the head and tossed them out into the forest.

Continuing on the brothers saw another deer running and chased it to another house in the woods. This house was three times as big as the first house and festooned with all manner of decoration on the outside. They had been traveling for quite some time now so they decided once again to go in and seek shelter from the night and the beasts of the forest inside. Inside the house they found all manner of food and drink sitting out for them. So much food that a whole army could not eat it in fifty years, and all of it was served on silver and gold plates with intricate patterns hammered into the edges.

As soon as the oldest brother saw this he immediately began greedily eating every kind of food he could see. Much of the food he didn't finish and threw away after one bite. He also bagged much of the extravagant decorations and gold serving wear of the house.

When the middle brother saw his older brother behaving thusly, he decided it might be better if he had some reservation. He sat down to eat in a very prudent way at first, but after a while he was stuffing himself with the exotic dishes and drinking the various wines and liquors. Like his older brother he ended up wasting much of the food he set to eat.

As the youngest brother stood back watching his brothers make such spectacles of themselves he decided it was best if he made sure he didn't do the same. He took an empty plate and went around and filled his plate with the various foods and filled one cup with drink to take with his meal.

They all fell asleep and the next day were woken up but a man once inch tall with a beard 3 miles long. "What has happened here?" said the small man. "Just when I was having a banquet set for my two brothers and I, some people had to come in and spoil all the preparations! No matter, what is lost can be gained again. But for you three I have gifts for all."

The little man turned to the oldest brother, "From now on, you will be able to transform from a man into a Bright Falcon by striking the earth." To the middle brother he said, "I give you this magic whistle. Whenever somebody is asleep and you need to wake them just blow this whistle and they will awaken no matter the cause of their slumber." To the youngest brother he said, "And to you I give these magic gloves. Whoever wears these gloves will suffer anything to escape their grasp." After saying this, the little man threw them all out into the forest.

They began walking again and came to a place where three roads met the one they were on. There was a sign at this point that read: "To he who travels to the left is a destiny of Fame and renown. To he who travels strait happiness is promised. To the traveler of the road to the right, the only promise is a life of exquisite misery."

The oldest brother then said, "There are three roads, and three of us. It follows that each of us should follow a different one. So I propose we have a vote as to whether or not we should be allowed to choose a road based on age order. I vote yes." The youngest brother was the only one to oppose, but once again, it was 2 against one, so he could do nothing. The brothers said good-bye, and all went their separate ways.

The first brother came to a castle. In the middle of the castle was a tall tower. He entered into the castle. The king of the castle was making a proclamation that whoever could get the key to the tower out of his daughter's hand would wed her, and inherit his kingdom. The

oldest brother struck the ground and turned into a falcon. He flew up to the top of the tower, landed turned back into a Man and greeted the beautiful princess. The princess gave him the key, and he turned into a falcon with the key in his claws flew back down turned into a man, and presented the key to the king. The king was delighted and the oldest brother and the princess were married that day. Soon after, the king died and the prince took over the kingdom. He became well known as the king who could turn into a falcon. Then one day a nobleman from the East came to visit. He wanted to see the king turn into a falcon, so he did. The nobleman from the East held out a mouse, and the king flew over to eat it, but as soon as he landed, a trap sprung, and the king was caught in a small cage. The nobleman from the East rode off with a king in a little cage! So the oldest brother became known as the famous king who was trapped in a cage by a man from the East.

The second brother walked along for a short time and came to a little house with a beautiful maiden living alone due to the deaths of her parents. There was no food, so he took out his magical place mat, and had food for himself and the maiden. He and the maiden had a pleasant conversation and this went on for several days. After a long time or a short time, the middle brother asked the maiden to marry him. She said yes and the two went to bed for the first time as a couple engaged to be married. That night when he was asleep and dreaming, the maiden pulled a sharp dagger out and slit the middle brother's neck. He never woke up, and so never knew what had happened in the end.

The third brother went on and came to a castle in disrepair. He entered the castle and found sitting down to eat Koshchei the deathless, and a maiden so beautiful that words from neither tongue nor pen could describe her accurately. Ivan went back outside and hid. Once he saw Koshchei leave he ran inside to the maiden.

"Hello beautiful maiden, I have come to rescue you from your captor. Follow me," Kupova The beautiful maiden smiled, but informed Ivan that if

Koshchei the deathless found her gone, he would always be able to find her again, and would kill him on the spot. Just then the doors slammed open, and in burst Koshchei the deathless.

"Who is this?" thundered Koshchei. Kupova said that he was just a lost merchant trying to sell his wares. "Oh, well have him leave now," said Koshchei.

The next day after Koshchei the deathless left, Ivan snuck in again to talk to Kupova. Again he tried to steal her away, but she told him of the doom set for both of them if he tried.

After the thirteenth month of daily visits and excuses to Koshchei the deathless, Kupova the beautiful maiden finally agreed to go with Ivan. "It would be impossible to outrun the horse of Koshchei the deathless, no matter what other horse you had. The only way is to use his horse somehow, but his horse is so strong, you would be thrown and killed in an instant." Ivan produced his magic gloves that could hold onto anything without letting go, and while Koshchei the deathless was asleep, he mounted his powerful steed. The horse bucked and jumped all over the place, and rolled on the ground to get Ivan off of him, but his gloves held fast. After a time Ivan had tamed the wild horse, and Kupova mounted behind Ivan and they rode off.

On they rode over the thirteenth ocean and to the thirteenth kingdom. They rode over an old battlefield covered with discarded weapons and armor. At this point they saw Koshchei the deathless

standing with his sharp saber drawn ready to chop Ivan into bits.

They rode on again. Past the thrice ninth land to the thrice tenth kingdom, and again there was Koshchei the deathless. "I'll have to kill him then," said Ivan, "We can't run on like this forever."

Ivan ran up to Koshchei the deathless with his sword and slashed at his arm. Koshchei the deathless just laughed but Kupova cried out. Ivan looked over and saw that she was bleeding from the same spot where Ivan cut Koshchei the deathless. While Koshchei the deathless was still laughing Ivan got back up on the horse and rode off with Kupova.

And so Ivan and Kupova the beautiful maiden went on running at top speed from Koshchei the deathless, who was always at their back, and always in front of them. Ivan could never leave Kupova to Koshchei the deathless due to her incomparable radiance, and Kupova grew to love Ivan more and more every day as he tried to help her escape even though it was impossible. The more Kupova came to love Ivan, the slower Koshchei the deathless chased them. Finally on the thrice ninth day after the thrice tenth year of running away, Kupova the beautiful maiden produced a white egg and threw it under the hooves of the horse where it was trampled. Koshchei the deathless yelled out and was no more.

The two took this to be a good sign, and rode to the nearest church in a flash, and were married that day. I was at their wedding and drank beer, but it ran down off my mustache and none went into my mouth.